

SENATOR VI SIMPSON



Connecting with the public

One of my most important responsibilities as your State Senator is to provide you with significant and timely information about what is happening at the Indiana General Assembly. By keeping you informed, you gain a better understanding of the process and what lawmakers are trying to accomplish.



Many of the ideas under consideration come directly from citizens. Personal contact with constituents has a direct impact on the legislation we consider and what ultimately becomes law.

This year, I am launching a new initiative to further connect with my constituents. For those of you with email access, I would like to offer daily updates throughout session. Your immediate feedback will be vitally important. I hope you will take advantage of this great opportunity!

Subscribe to receive daily updates

www.in.gov/s40

Dear Friends:

I would like to take this opportunity to inform you about some of the issues facing state legislators as we begin the 114th Indiana General Assembly in January.

How to properly fund public schools, provide relief for Hoosiers most affected by rising health care costs, enhance economic development initiatives, continue efforts to retrain our workforce and create more jobs are just a few of the issues to be considered as we work together to make Indiana an even better place to live, work and raise our families.

Crafting a new state budget for the next two fiscal years will top the legislative agenda. Although we have managed to maintain solid reserves throughout the national recession, the state is facing a gap between expected spending and projected revenues. The key to managing the budget will be to cut spending by finding new efficiencies, consolidating agencies and eliminating ineffective programs. Vital services must be protected as well as education funding or Indiana will begin to lose its ability to develop economically and grow our way out of the current fiscal situation. As the Ranking Minority Member on the Senate Appropriations Committee, I will be actively involved in these deliberations. Other Senate committees I will be serving on include: Tax and Fiscal Policy; Health and Provider Services; and Economic Development and Technology.

As your State Senator, it is my job to communicate to the General Assembly the issues that matter most to the citizens of Senate District 40. Most of the bills that become law will in some way affect all of us, our families and our communities. Please contact me by phone, mail or email, and let me know your thoughts and concerns. The legislative process works best when citizens get involved. I look forward to hearing from you.

Wishing you a healthy and prosperous New Year,

Vi Simpson

RESIDENCE

4965 W. Woodland Drive
Bloomington, IN 47404
812-876-2908

STATE CAPITOL

200 W. Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2785
800-382-9467 or 317-232-9849

ONLINE

S40@IN.gov
www.IN.gov/S40

**REPRESENTING SENATE DISTRICT 40
INCLUDING BROWN AND MONROE COUNTIES**

Simpson's legislative initiatives

I am introducing several proposals this session including one that would make improvements to Indiana's unemployment insurance (UI) program. Under current law, workers who have been laid off who qualify for UI benefits must wait two weeks before they receive their first unemployment check. This often results in serious financial problems, especially for those with families who need this assistance as soon as possible. My bill would speed up this process and allow unemployed workers to collect their first benefit check after only one week.

A few of my bills focus on health care issues. One measure would allow small businesses to join the state's bulk prescription drug purchasing program (*discussed further under "Health Care" article on Page 3*). Another one of my initiatives is aimed at ensuring that Hoosier children receiving Medicaid assistance are tested for lead poisoning and receive appropriate treatment if their tests turn up

positive. If left untreated, lead poisoning can result in developmental and medical problems in children. My goal is make sure that children who have been exposed to lead poisoning are identified and treated as soon as possible. This bill is a result of recommendations made by members of the Select Joint Commission on Medicaid Oversight. I serve on this commission.

I will also be introducing legislation to require that new single family homes built after July 1, 2005 be equipped with carbon monoxide detectors. Indiana law already requires that all homes be equipped with smoke detectors. Carbon monoxide, or CO as it is sometimes known, is a colorless, tasteless, and odorless gas. In homes, carbon monoxide poisoning is often caused by faulty gas furnaces or wood burning stoves. The U.S. Fire Administration reports that CO poisoning is responsible for over 200 deaths and 10,000 hospitalizations in the U.S. each year.

Issues confronting education

Legislators will be dealing with a host of education issues this year. While creating a new state appropriations plan, fiscal members will examine one of the budget's biggest components - **funding for education**. There will be renewed efforts to provide adequate funding for school corporations based on each community's needs and challenges.



How to continue progress on **school standards and accountability** given the state's budget restrictions will also be a dominate issue. The federal No Child Left Behind Act, which requires the implementation of higher standards and greater teacher accountability, has never been fully funded by the federal government forcing the state to dip into its own reserves.

Last year, knowing the importance of **early childhood learning opportunities**, legislators came close to passing a comprehensive program to expand optional full-day kindergarten and other early education programs. Regrettably, agreement could not be reached on how to fund the initiative. Consequently, this school year only 6,000 students attend full-day kindergarten statewide, although there are more than 500,000 Hoosiers under the age of six. It is my hope that this initiative will be re-introduced and receive further consideration. Additionally, lawmakers may consider a different approach that would move the current kindergarten enrollment date from July 1 to September 1.

The **Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus test (ISTEP+)** is a tool used to assess the educational progress of students in grades 3, 6, 8 and 10. The test is currently given in the fall so teachers can continue to work with students in areas that need more attention. Legislation may be considered to move the test to the spring to better assess what students have learned. Opponents feel that conducting the test in the spring would leave little time to address problems.

***K-12 Education
accounts for 36%
of Indiana's
annual budget.***

—Have questions?—

Visiting the State House?

Want more information on legislation?

—www.in.gov/s40—

Unfunded federal mandates

Costs of federal programs could shift to states

In these tight fiscal times, a major concern facing state legislators is the possibility of more federal mandates that shift additional costs to state and local units of government. The National Conference of State Legislatures released a study last March reporting that states have been confronted with \$29 billion in cost shifts. This figure is projected to increase to nearly \$34 billion in 2005.

I support valuable programs such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), but I am very concerned that the federal government will continue to shift the cost of these programs to the states as unfunded mandates. The funding shortfall from the federal government is estimated to be \$480 million just for 2004. If Indiana had received adequate program funding over the past several years, the state would

not be facing a budget gap today.

IDEA was created in 1975 to provide every special education student with an additional 40 percent of the cost of general education students. The program was to be fully funded by 1982, but states never received their full allocations. In 2002, Indiana should have received a total of \$420.4 million for special education students, but only \$171 million was dispersed. To make up for the lost funding, the state and local school districts scrambled to find millions in lost revenue to provide the programs required for special education students.

These "Catch 22" cost shifts are contributing to our state's fiscal problems and are an unrealistic expectation. It is time for state and local officials to band together to halt the renewed push by Congress of federal mandates upon the states.

Focus on: **HEALTH CARE**

The rising costs of health care will undoubtedly receive much attention this session. As many as 600,000 Hoosiers are without health insurance coverage. Many of these individuals are employed by small businesses which are finding it increasingly difficult to cover the rising costs of health care for their employees.



A governor's task force has been developing a plan designed to reduce the growing number of Hoosiers with no health insurance. The "Hoosier Health Plan" recommends the pooling of small businesses and individuals who are self-employed to provide affordable health care under a bulk-purchasing plan with competitive rates. The state received federal funding to support the startup of the program, but it will now be up to the new administration and the General Assembly to determine how to use the grant for pilot programs.

**As many as
600,000 Hoosiers
are without health
insurance coverage.**

Legislators will also consider a bill that I have authored to expand the state's new bulk pre-

scription drug purchasing program established by legislation enacted by the 2004 General Assembly. The program created a pool of more than 400,000 state, local, and public university employees to increase the state's buying power and the ability to negotiate lower prescription drug costs. My legislation offers the opportunity for lawmakers to consider the possibility of expanding the pool to include small businesses, county hospitals, and non-profit organizations.



State Senator Vi Simpson
200 West Washington Street
Indianapolis, IN 46204-2785
Toll-free: 800-382-9467
E-mail: S40@IN.gov

PRESORTED
STANDARD
US POSTAGE PAID
INDIANAPOLIS, IN
PERMIT NO 8644

Nashville receives state grant for downtown revitalization



I am pleased to report that the Town of Nashville recently received a \$450,000 Community Focus Fund (CFF) grant from the Indiana Department of Commerce to support the town's downtown revitalization efforts.

The grant will be used to enhance the downtown area by making improvements to the deteriorating infrastructure, installing more street lights, and adding more trash receptacles and benches along sidewalks. These improvements will occur along Franklin, Jefferson, Main, and Van Buren streets.

These revitalization efforts will help support Nashville's thriving tourist industry, which draws over three million visitors annually and pumps an estimated \$155 million per year into the local economy.

Helping to make Nashville a more attractive tourist destination will also benefit Monroe County. Many visitors to Brown County often visit Bloomington and other nearby communities.

Obtaining a CFF grant is not a quick or simple process. It requires extensive work and planning on the part of local officials to complete and file an application and work it through the process. Furthermore, there is intense competition for these grants among Indiana communities. I congratulate Nashville's local officials on securing this grant.